

WASHINGTON POST
12 July 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-25

Richard Cohen

... And Our Hypocrisy

Hold the policy papers and suspend all meetings on terrorism. What this administration needs is not a new policy, not better intelligence and certainly not more street-corner rhetoric, but a good full-length mirror. It just might see a hypocrite there.

Take the way we look at Cuba. It was cited by President Reagan as one of the five key exporters of terrorism, the new "Murder Incorporated." That was quite a speech the president gave, replete with full-throated self-righteous indignation. Fidel Castro, take that!

But what about what the United States has done to Cuba? Ours is the government, after all, that in 1961 produced the Bay of Pigs fiasco—an invasion of Cuba. Following that, the United States attempted to assassinate Castro, tried to slip a mickey into his cigars so his beard would fall out and even asked members of the Mafia to see if they could not, in their parlance, get the Cuban leader to sleep with the fishes. If this is not terrorism—state-supported terrorism at that—then Jesse Helms and Liberace are the same person.

How about Nicaragua? It, too, was on the president's list. This is not mere hypocrisy, but elephantine chutzpah. The Reagan administration, after all, has been funding for years now an attempt to topple the Sandinista regime by among other things—brace yourself—terrorism. The contras, with the aid of the CIA, have mined

harbors, assassinated officials, killed Sandinista supporters and blown up an occasional building. The administration links Nicaragua to the murder of Marines in El Salvador, but fails to link that atrocity to the murder of Nicaraguans by the contras.

Third on Reagan's list was Iran. Unlike Cuba and Nicaragua, there is little doubt Iran is in the terrorism business in a serious, methodical way. But even so, the ayatollah must have gasped at the epic gall of the United States' pointing a finger in the direction of his country after the CIA, in 1953, toppled the government of Mohammed Mossadeh and restored the shah to power.

None of this history excuses Nicaragua, Cuban or Iranian terrorism—and says nothing about the other two nations on the list, Libya and North Korea. And, at least to us, it has to make some difference that the United States really does represent something good in the world and that the nations on the list are nondemocratic regimes of varying degrees of loathsomeness.

But in Iran in 1953, we did not use terror to make life better for the average Iranian or to restore nonexistent democracy, but to keep that country and its oil safe for the Western democracies and, of course, the oil companies. The same thing holds for Nicaragua now. We did not, for example, use terror to topple the truly brutal Somoza regime. We reserve it for regimes with which we have ideological differences.

The political right, of which this administration is a part, loathes what it calls "moral equivalency" and even sponsors seminars to denounce it. Okay—but moral equivalency is really a straw man. The real danger in Washington was never that brutal regimes would be seen as our moral equivalent but that self-righteousness would blind us to the consequences of our own actions. Moral obtuseness, not moral equivalency, is the real danger.